

NATHAN HALE

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Nathan Hale by Jean Christie Root

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JEAN CHRISTIE ROOT

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The statue by Frederick MacMonnies, erected in City Hall Park, New York City.

"I wish to be useful, and every kind of service necessary for the public good becomes honorable by being necessary." — NATHAN HALE.

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BY

JEAN CHRISTIE ROOT

"O Beautiful! my Country!
What were our lives without thee?
What all our lives to save thee?
We reck not what we gave thee;
We will not dare to doubt thee,
But ask whatever else, and we will dare!"

Commemoration Ode,

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

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PREFACE

MANY a man dies at what appears to onlookers the very zenith of fame, — the very summit of success. But as Time moves on, its relentless finger first dims, then absolutely effaces, his personal records, so that, even to the generation immediately following him, his former fame becomes incredible. The marvel is not when a man's standing is in time lowered, but rather when some invisible power, — call it what you will, — through slow, revolving years, lifts him ever higher, until his fame becomes a national crown of glory and bids fair — like that of the dead at Thermopylæ, or the victors at Marathon, or of individuals like Washington and Lincoln — to last as long as time shall last. If sometimes true of mature men, this has seldom been true of very young men. Indeed, so short is this list that but two names are recalled as of abiding interest; one, that of Arthur Henry Hallam, enshrined in the imperishable lines of "In Memoriam," the voicing of Tennyson's love and sorrow; while to colonial America and the year of our national independence, and to Yale,

his alma mater, belong the splendid story of a youth who courageously gave up a life that he had willingly risked for his country, accepting an ignominious death with more than Spartan firmness, at the age of twenty-one years, three months, and sixteen days.

Both of these names, perhaps especially that of Nathan Hale, seem destined to go on increasing in radiant influence and strong inspiration century after century. Such souls, however, are not accidents, but are the perfected fruit of generations of character and growth. Their development may sometimes appear due to opportunity; and the strength of the soul that is in them, lacking that opportunity, might have lain hidden.

It is an inspiring fact that, as we study the early days of our country, we find so many men and women bearing, naturally, in their everyday life, these splendid traits of character. Wealth did not then abound—character did. The patriot of to-day may be pardoned if, as he contrasts the past and the present, he remembers with a sigh the simple, early life of the American people, and the splendid ability of the sons and daughters who went forth from those unpretentious homes to meet responsibilities, to conquer difficulties, and to lay broad the foundations for the noblest republic the world has yet known. The story we present of Nathan Hale

is that of a boy reared in one of those rural homes, presided over by upright parents whose children were trained to master life, to meet death fearlessly, and all unconsciously to win ever-growing reverence.

The story of this boy, of his home, and of the future to which his training led him, is well worth our closest and earnest consideration.

It is impossible to claim originality in any important detail in the sketch of a life so brief as Nathan Hale's. Especially is this true when that life has been so carefully studied and so ably presented by such men as the Hon. Isaac W. Stuart, Mr. Benson J. Lossing, Professor Henry P. Johnston, George Dudley Seymour, Esq., and the Rev. Anson Phelps Stokes, Secretary of Yale University, — all men who have come under the spell of that brave boy, and who have portrayed him as they believed him to have been.

This little book differs from their writing, to which it is greatly indebted, principally in the fact that it pictures him as seen through a woman's eyes; lifted above all mortal loss, transfigured as have been all who have made the Great Surrender for "right because it is right," and who have gone forward, victorious through seeming defeat.

